



Lolo National Forest
Building 24 Fort Missoula
Missoula, Montana 59804

Effective Fire Suppression Outcome Began With Community Fire Protection Partnerships

Jocko Lakes Fire, Seeley Lake, Montana, August 2008

In Seeley Lake, Montana, a community's commitment to work together against the threat of fire began with a meeting in 2002 when citizens, local agencies and landowners decided to collaborate to reduce fuels in the Wildland Urban Interface. Those initial talks led to the creation of a Community Wildfire Protection Plan (Seeley/Swan Fire plan) that was published in 2004, the creation of the Seeley Lake Fuels Mitigation Task Force, and an aggressive and focussed pursuit of community objectives tierred from the National Fire Plan. Over the last six years the Task Force has helped landowners complete over \$258,000 of grant funded work on over 250 acres. The community has another \$243,000 of grant-funded work in the pipeline on an additional 150 acres. And 2,000 acres of fuel reduction work has been completed on lands of the Seeley Lake Ranger District of the Lolo National Forest and Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation land.

The people of Seeley Lake and agency officials knew that fire would visit their community as it had done in the past and that awareness was clearly present in the actions that landowners were taking in the subdivision of Eagle Point in 2007. And in early August, a lightning-ignited crown fire moved rapidly toward the subdivision from the west. Fuel reduction work by one private landowner gave the Incident Commander of the Jocko Lakes Fire an opportunity he would not have had otherwise.

"They felt that because they had done that work, they could do these burnouts," said Tim Love, Seeley Lake District Ranger. The burnout allowed the firefighters to remove remaining fuel in a controlled



The Jocko Lakes Fire, looking west. August, 2007. The area near the private home pictured above was "back-burned," giving firefighters a tactical advantage in stopping the fire. Fuel reduction work on the land had taken place before the fire. The work of the Seeley Lake Fuels Mitigation Task Force created awareness within the subdivision for reducing fuels.

manner, Love noted "The burnout, and the advantage it gave the Incident Commander, could not have been achieved if fuel reduction work had not been completed." Other landowners in the Eagle Point subdivision had completed grant-supported work. "Clearly, the Task Force work has increased the awareness for the need to do fuel mitigation work," said Jon Haufler, Eagle Point resident and Task Force leader.

"They felt that because they had done that work, they could do these burnouts," said Tim Love, Seeley Lake District Ranger. "The burnout, and the advantage it gave the Incident Commander, could not have been done if that fuel reduction work had not been completed."